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Stalin Is Still Smiling

Resolved to obliterate all thought and behavior not dictated by themselves, the Soviet leaders of the 1980s have resurrected the spirit of Stalin—the megalomaniac whose mad purges and pogroms consumed millions of innocent lives

By John Barron

Alexei Nikitin was so popular among fellow workers at a Ukrainian mine that he became their unofficial spokesman, presenting grievances and pointing out dangerous conditions. Mine administrators rejected his appeals and, just as he had warned, the mine exploded, killing 7 men and injuring more than 100. When Nikitin persisted in protesting violations of official rules, authorities locked him up in a mental institution.

Having survived nearly eight years in psycho-prisons, Nikitin dared to talk to two American correspondents after his release in 1980. For that, he was again arrested and incarcerated in a special psychiatric hospital. Now, forcibly administered drugs are causing him to go blind.

Nikitin had been examined by Dr. Anatoly Koryagin, an internationally honored Soviet psychiatrist. Koryagin's findings were published in a British medical journal in 1981: Nikitin and a number of other so-called insane dissidents were in fact quite normal.

The KGB arrested Koryagin on a charge of disseminating anti-Soviet propaganda. According to *Wall Street Journal* special correspondent David Satter, a KGB officer told Koryagin, "If you refuse to cooperate, we'll make you forget that you are a doctor and a man."

"I may never work as a doctor," Koryagin replied, "but I'll remain a man no matter what you do."

Last year in Chistopol Prison, 500 miles east of Moscow, the KGB began torturing Koryagin to force him to recant his diagnosis. He refused, the beatings continued, and sometimes his screams were heard even outside the prison.

When his family was last permitted to visit, Koryagin was so sick and emaciated that his six-year-old son did not recognize him. The American Psychiatric Association appealed to the Kremlin for mercy, but in vain. Because he refuses to lie, Koryagin probably will die.

New Terror. Within the past three years, countless Soviet citizens have been imprisoned for such acts as reading the Bible in public, participating in art exhibitions, urging trust between Russia and America, teaching the Koran, trying to form a peace movement, asking or merely *intending* to emigrate. Others have been locked up for gathering evidence of discrimination against Jews, exposing thievery by factory bosses, carrying Baptist literature, advocating nuclear disarmament, telling anti-Soviet jokes, refusing to act as a KGB informant.

In the past, the rules were more clear-cut. "There were at least certain 'dos and don'ts'—what you could get away with and what would land you behind bars," says poet Yuri Kublanovsky, exiled in 1982. "This is no longer true. People are going underground. What else can they do?"

As in the days of Stalin, Soviet citizens are being encouraged to inform on one another anonymously. Last year, the police began circulating post cards inviting people to report the suspected misdeeds of their friends and neighbors. This squeal-by-mail program spreads fear by making virtually everybody the potential prey of malicious gossips, crackpots and anyone with a personal grudge.

Instead of being released at the end of their terms, many political prisoners under Stalin were simply resentenced. Last October, the Soviets opened the way for the widespread resumption of this Stalinist practice. They issued a decree authorizing prison wardens and concentration-camp commandants to add, at their discretion, up to five years to the sentence of a political prisoner adjudged guilty of breaching discipline. Thus, authorities can hold an inmate indefinitely, merely

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by extending a sentence each time its expiration nears—in effect transforming a short prison sentence into a long, slow death sentence.

During the reign of Stalin, the secret police tortured political prisoners with the aim of turning them into zombies for show trials. Boasted one of Stalin's minions, "Give me a night with a man and I'll have him confessing he is the king of England."

Within the past two years—during the brief reign of former KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov—the Soviets have reinstated officially sanctioned torture to extract false confessions. Interrogators or prison guards may administer the torture themselves, or let others do it for them in so-called pressure cells. The social reformer, religious believer, peace advocate or errant intellectual is locked in the special cell. Then real criminals, often violently sadistic, are placed in the same cell, free to beat and rape the wayward inmate as they please. Afterward, interrogators suggest that the victims can avoid repetition of such agonies by recanting their beliefs.

Numerous cases of torture have been confirmed by Amnesty International, the group that tries to help prisoners of conscience in all nations. Physicist Yuri Orlov was sentenced to seven years in prison for human-rights activities. His wife revealed to a Western news correspondent that in January 1983 prison officials looked on while her husband was brutally beaten. Five months later, she was told that he had been removed to a prison hospital suffering from "skull and brain trauma."

Some prisoners who succumb may be heard confessing on television. Vadim Repin, a typographer, was Leningrad administrator of a fund established by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to aid relatives of political prisoners. The money—all of the royalties from Solzhenitsyn's book *Gulag Archipelago*—is kept in Switzerland and disbursed in the Soviet Union by volunteers. In December 1981 the KGB arrested Repin and charged him with treason punishable by death. Fifteen months later, Repin appeared on television a spiritually broken man. "With the help of investigators," he announced, he finally "saw the light." Solzhenitsyn's Russian Social Fund, he confessed, was actually an espionage organization financed by Western intelligence services.

The manager of the fund in Moscow, Sergei Khodorovich, a computer specialist, issued a statement saying, "Although sympathy and mercy are clearly incompatible with communist ideology, charity is not formally forbidden by Soviet law. Thus, the authorities have resorted to calling the fund a spy organization established by the West."

In retaliation, the KGB arrested Khodorovich on April 7, 1983, charged him with treason, and began torturing him at Moscow's Butyrka Prison. Khodorovich's religious and moral convictions gave him the strength to resist until, on September 30, 1983, the KGB fractured his skull. He has yet to recover.

Psycho-Prisons. The perversion of psychiatry for purposes of political repression represents a unique Soviet contribution to the methodology of totalitarianism and has become "a countrywide, large-scale phenomenon," according to a leading authority on the subject, Prof. Peter Reddaway of the London School of Economics. Any Soviet citizen can be forcibly confined if he is found guilty of "socially dangerous acts." Ordinarily, guilt is determined at a cursory hearing during which the accused is usually not present or represented by anyone.

Special psychiatric hospitals in which such patients are interned look exactly like the prisons they are, guarded by watchtowers, barbed wire, armed sentries and dogs. Most of the administrative and medical staff hold police ranks, while the orderlies are generally criminals drafted from concentration camps. Inmates are "treated" solely for their beliefs, subjected to comas induced by insulin shock, and dosed with powerful drugs that have painful and sometimes permanently debilitating side effects. Evidence of this form of torture has been provided by survivors, émigré psychiatrists and Russian scientists and is so overwhelming that the Soviets had to quit the World Psychiatric Association last year to avoid the possibility of a humiliating ouster.

Vladimir Tsurikov was put in a psychiatric hospital in 1980 on grounds that he suffered from "emigrational delusions" (wanting to leave the Soviet Union). He describes the effects of excessive drug dosages: "Triftazin made me writhe, and my legs began to twist about. I lost the ability to walk and had sharp pains in my buttocks at any movement, a result of sulfazin. Frequent fainting fits began; I fell and hit my head on the floor and on the brick walls. Pain prevented me from sleeping or eating; my tongue hung out. This nightmare lasted a week."

After such a treatment, a psychiatrist will suggest that the "patient" may wish to change his or her views. Many refuse—and the treatment continues. The drugs can permanently maim the victims, both physically and psychologically. Some eventually lose their personality and capacity to think.

"This is what victims cannot help but fear: that the drugs and the rest of the treatment will change their entire personality," says Charles H. Fairbanks, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights. "Psychiatric abuse attempts to touch the very springs of thinking and feeling."

Fear of Yoga. Anyone who openly deviates from the party line, who listens to foreign broadcasts, participates in an independent movement of any kind, however tiny and innocuous, is a prospective victim. Last year, for example, physical therapist V. A. Sukhova was sentenced to three years in a concentration camp because she did yoga exercises. What's wrong with yoga? The Soviets view it as a form of mysticism which might lead to independent thought and behavior.

Christians are especially feared because they give their highest allegiance to God rather than the party. In the past two years, the Soviets have intensified persecution of Christians. Luba Kosachevich was arrested for printing Bibles. At her

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trial she testified: "I love life, I love the blue sky. I love the budding trees and flowers, but more than anything else I love God, and I'll give my life to serve him." Having lost everything, including her health, in prison, she wrote, "It's worth it to believe!"

In 1975 the Soviet Union, United States and 33 other nations signed the Helsinki accords, wherein the Western nations in effect recognized Soviet colonization of Eastern Europe, and the Soviets in turn pledged to observe basic human rights.

Many Soviet citizens took these guarantees seriously, seeing in them a new era of liberty. A few citizens, 71 in all, even formed groups to monitor Soviet compliance with the human-rights agreements. But by the fall of 1982, most of the Helsinki Monitors, as they became known, had been imprisoned, put in mental institutions or exiled. To escape the same fate, the remaining members of the Helsinki Monitors in Moscow disbanded. Thus the Soviet Union openly displays its contempt for fundamental international agreements.

Indefinite Suffering? The new Soviet ruler, Konstantin Chernenko, is unlikely to reverse the Stalinist trends set in motion by his predecessors. Shortly after he took over last February, a Moscow couple, Nikolai and Nadezhda Pankov, wrote him a congratulatory letter and reminded him that they had requested permission to emigrate. The two were promptly hauled off to a psychiatric hospital, where they are being "treated" with nerve drugs.

Whether the Soviet people will be willing to suffer indefinitely in a Stalinist straitjacket remains in doubt. An unsigned *samizdat* (underground press) manuscript published in the West last September reads: "The democratic and human-rights movements have been crushed. But the opposition, far from being crushed, continues to grow noticeably, freeing itself of illusions and changing its organization forms. It is becoming ever more massive in character and receding into the underground."

The manuscript ends in midsentence. Maybe it was interrupted by a KGB knock on the door. Maybe also the unknown author was right.